

## Southern Utah Thanks

We all remember the destructive Utah wildfires last summer. An estimated 363,000 acres of public and private rangeland were burned, destroying essential forage for thousands of livestock and wildlife. Roughly 100 ranch families had to deal with dead, injured or displaced animals. Of necessity, producers have been forced to make difficult economic decisions that will influence their businesses now and for years to come. There have been some partial herd liquidations, but most ranchers are still attempting to hang onto their income producing assets and preserve a way of life that has supported their families for generations. The wildfires have had, and will have, significant economic and emotional impacts on individuals, businesses and rural communities.

I just finished reading a Christmas card from the Kaufman Ranch at Black Rock in Millard County. I have taken several calls and read more than a few gracious cards from rural southern Utah families in recent weeks. They all want to know how to thank the 100 plus Cache County farmers and ranchers who donated hay last fall. Perhaps the best thing I can do in this column is to share a few lines from their cards or comments from their calls.

"Thank you so much for the semi load of hay that was sent to us. We grow a little hay to feed our cattle each year. After the fire in July we had to start feeding cattle early. By the time summer was over, our hay was gone. Thank you so much for helping us when our needs were desperate"

"We really appreciate the help. We appreciate the thoughtfulness, kindness and generosity. It's good quality hay. We are pleased to have it."

"This is a typical cowboy gesture. When you see your neighbors are down, help them out and lend a hand. If only the rest of the world ran that way. My hat goes off to Joe Fuhriman and any other cattleman who gave their support."

"We feel so blessed to have the hay you donated to us. Words cannot express our gratitude. Thank you so much."

"We are taking it one day at a time. We would like to thank the hay producers and the trucking companies."

"We hope you all know how much we appreciate all that you have done for us. May you be blessed in your service and love."

"Why would you do this for us? You don't even know us. Fortunately, you knew how panic-stricken we are wondering how we will feed our livestock. Is there any possible way we can find the names of all who donated so we can thank them personally?"

"This is about the nicest thing I have observed for a long time. Even small amounts of hay are appreciated. We still have problems, but it is nice to know we are not forgotten."

"All of us here in Beaver County send you this special greeting at Christmas time and express to you our sincere appreciation for your kindness and loyalty. We are deeply thankful for the donated hay and extend to our Cache Valley friends our best wishes for a happy holiday season."

I vividly remember sitting in the seat of the loader tractor at Caine Dairy on September 19 waiting for donations to arrive. After two hours I had only unloaded four bales of hay. I started to think our efforts would be a major disappointment. Then, almost by magic, the trucks and trailers started to arrive. Some had two bales, some donated a full load. The loader tractor was busy for most of the day. The same thing happened the next day. Cache County farmers and ranchers willingly gave 250 ton of quality hay.

Local truckers like Guy Chambers, Robert and Dennis Murray, and Sharp Transportation volunteered to transport the hay to Beaver and Millard counties. Their initial trips were generously donated. Cache Valley Bank, Western Ag Credit Bank and Cache County Farm Bureau paid for the balance of the trucking. Cache Valley Bank also established an account to accept cash donations from individuals who wanted to get involved that way. We used the donated cash to purchase additional hay.

Rich, San Pete, and Box Elder Counties along with some Southern Utah producers and Idaho farmers have also sent assistance. Mark Nelson, USU Agriculture Extension Agent in Beaver County, reports that 450 tons have been or soon will be delivered to needy ranch families.

Donations willingly given from this end of the state were relatively easy. The hard part came when our friends to the south had to methodically allocate a limited offering among all who need assistance so badly.

My personal thanks to good Cache Valley people who always seem to come through when needs are identified. May you all enjoy a very Merry Christmas!